

Transcription: Andy Stewart

Good morning. Today is Wednesday, November 19, 2014. My name is James Crabtree, and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Andy Stewart. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board's Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Stewart is at his home in San Antonio. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us. It's an honor for our program.

Andy Stewart: I'm thankful to you.

Yes sir. Thanks. The first question, sir, that we always start with is please tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.

Andy Stewart: Okay. Well, I was a baby boomer. Dad was in World War II but he didn't talk very much about his service. I know he was in the South Pacific, and I know we did not go to fireworks displays because he had been in the South Pacific until maybe, well, my teenage years. So that would have been late '60s, I guess, probably. So I guess I knew he was in the Marines because he would talk a lot with his uncles. My uncle was also in the South Pacific, and they met occasionally, just accidentally with military assignments. And I'm pretty sure my dad's sister, my Aunt Jana, was also a WAVE during World War II. I don't know very much about her service.

You had a family history, then, of service.

Andy Stewart: I'm pretty sure we did, like Veterans Day, Memorial Day parades with high school bands, and Dad was a good patriot. Here's a funny story. Once when I was in high school band, he did a recording of that, I think it may have been Red Skelton's Homage to the United States. He recorded that, and I think they had played that before high school basketball games or something like that for a long time.

Where did you grow up? Were you from Texas?

Andy Stewart: No. I grew up in Iowa. Dad was a vocational ag teacher. So I was actually . . . He was teaching in Pella, Iowa. I was born in Oskaloosa. But then he went from Pella to Postville, Iowa, way in the far northeast corner of the state. And then he went from there . . . He was thinking about a Ph.D. in vocational agriculture education or something like that. But we were at Michigan State for one year. East Lansing, Michigan. And then from there we moved to Maquoketa, Iowa, which is where my mom still lives. Dad's no longer living. So we traveled around a little bit but I was really blessed to have a loving family.

Okay, great. So you kind of consider yourself a native Iowan then as well.

Andy Stewart: Yeah.

Great. Were you living in Iowa then when you entered the military?

Andy Stewart: Yes.

Tell us a little bit about what it was that caused you to decide to enter the service.

Andy Stewart: That's an easy answer. That goes back to my student deferment from '67 through '72. And of course, that was the draft lottery years. I was number 28. I was at Ames when they did the TV broadcast of the numbers. And so then, by the time I had five years of school, it was definitely my time to go. But it was the end of the Vietnam era. That was '72 when I got drafted.

Okay. What were your thoughts when you . . . I guess you got a draft notice in the mail?

Andy Stewart: Actually, I think I went home and Mom and Dad called me right away. You got a . . . I think it was "Greetings." That was the first word of the letter. I think I was pretty naïve. Most about the activity in Vietnam. I would see a newspaper regularly at school. But I don't think I really had very much of a sense of what was really going on in global politics. My hometown was probably 5,000 people. But I was on a university campus so there was a little bit of antiwar protesting during that time too. I was on the very margins of that kind of the edges of the crowd of that activity too.

When you got drafted, how long did you have before you had to report? Ship off?

Andy Stewart: I think my physical was probably in Des Moines. I know it was in Des Moines. That was maybe a couple of months before . . . I'm not saying for sure that spring. I'm not sure of that exact date. But then I ended up ending up going to Des Moines for entrance processing. The MEP Station in June. The end of June '72.

Was there ever any thought that you would go to Officer Candidate School or something off the bat because you were in college?

Andy Stewart: No, I didn't really think about that at all. I was . . . I knew people that would have advised, "You might as well go to Candidate," but with my background, I wouldn't have ever done that. Would have skipped out on the obligation, even though I did miss most of the, all of the, Vietnam hostility. I was willing to take my turn, I guess you'd say.

What are your memories of basic training in 1972?

Andy Stewart: Well, that was really an eye-opening experience for me. I had probably never been around very many other Black people. Of course we had Blacks in our platoon, our company. That was in Fort Leonard Wood, where my basic training was.

Okay. In Missouri?

Andy Stewart: Probably a geographic thing. And we got there in the middle of the night and that must be part of the process. That they would kind of shock us into recognition and awareness even though we had been naïve two days before. I think there was an element of seeing different socioeconomic levels. It would have been different from my small town bringing up too. I had been to Boy Scout camp and stuff like that but this was a little bit wider diverse, wider diversity than I was used to. Although my advantage was that I was a little bit older than the average right out of high school.

The fact that you'd had college and that sort of thing as well.

Andy Stewart: Right. Right. That actually paid off a couple of times. Once I was an applejack. I was an acting corporal within my company, and I'm not sure exactly what that really meant. It must have been like, essentially, like a residence hall floor subgroup of the company. Then they had something called the Special Leadership Preparation Program and I was in that. I don't remember much about it. I had my notebook for a while but it was kind of an exposure to the idea of leading. Do you have time for one detail on that?

Absolutely. We want to record your memories.

Andy Stewart: There was one time, and I think it was the idea that . . . The overall idea was to show you that if you yelled at people you would be less likely to get their respect and followership than if you were more of a let's work this out kind of thing. And to show us, basically trainees, that message, they brought in a different member of the cadre. I don't know if he was an NCO or an officer, but he was putting on a show but we didn't know that at the time. He was just ranting it up, yelling and calling us names in the group. And I think that message stuck with me through my whole work career. That you've got to get along better than that if you want to get anything done as a leader. It must have been, I'd say at least a 15-minute rant, and then it ended. We probably thought, we did a little bit of analyzing at the end, but I remember that really clearly. I think that was just an additional duty. We would kind of march over, maybe two or three from each platoon to a different building, and then have this kind of classwork session. Some of it was just fill-in-the-blank type answers in our workbook, if I remember. I don't think there's any special recognition at the end. I know it was a SLPP, was the abbreviation of that.

Did you know at that time, when you were in training, what your specialty was going to be when you graduated? Was that determined yet?

Andy Stewart: No, we found out towards the end of basic training. And I think my orders were either mixed up or I thought I was going to be an MP for a while. That didn't turn out to be the Army's needs at that time. They were apparently fairly high for HAWK missile crewmen. Sixteen Echo MOS. And if you remember . . . Sometimes you see pictures of the old missile. There were three . . . They used to be black and white then they switched them to camouflage color. And there would be three on a mounter, mounted. And there were . . . For a while they had trailers, so that was HAWK towed. T-O-W-E-D. There was also HAWK self-propels. That was kind of tract vehicle. And then I think there were some of those deployed in Korea and Germany because some of the sergeants would come back and that's where they'd been. That was Fort Bliss, Texas. Air Defense Artillery Center. And it was kind of unique because this was not a regular AIT. Not a regular advanced training. They just put us in what they called "AIT slash OJT," on-the-job training. So we worked with the actual sergeants and warrant officers and officers that worked with these radars, two or three different kinds of radars. And there was . . . There was, of course, the launcher. Then there was a control, like a typical military box that had the results of the radar screens and that type of thing. BLC, maybe, I'm not sure about that. So they just stuck us in this unit so we had a provisional company of trainees. And they took someone out of the S3 office and he was the provisional trainee company commander. And then, because of my college, another way that I was advantaged. I had a . . . I was the top graduate. It was kind of, I would say, fairly simple multiple choice test, and I was the one that had scored the highest all the way along.

That's great. Was there ever a thought that at some point you might go to Vietnam? I know the war was winding down at that point with détente and everything, but was there any chance that you might go or was there any trepidation in your mind that you might have to be there?

Andy Stewart: I remember trepidation. I think '72 was the Paris Peace Talks, at least some of the beginning, or something like that. So things were definitely winding down there. And I didn't really worry or think I might go to Vietnam, I don't think, because of the peace talks there. The other thing that was kind of unique about my basic training AIT was, AIT/OJT, because I was the top graduate I was asked to be a clerk typist in the S3 office. So the level of training, that was good for me too. It kept me off the traditional KP duties and guard duties. Think I might have done guard duty one time as a soldier. Of course, it was just a two-year time. So I probably finished up with our AIT at the end of '72. I don't know that exact date, but a year and a half later I was home. June '74.

I understand you had a long gap between when you left the service in '74 until you came back into the reserve in 1989. Talk to us about that because that seems like that's unique. I know there are some that will take some time off but for yours to have been so long and then to be able to come back in. What was that like?

Andy Stewart: It was, it is quite a bit unusual. One thing it put me in a different, a whole different cycle of age with my Army Reserve peers. But a friend of mine that I knew from church in Missouri . . . Let me fill in a couple of the blanks there.

Okay.

Andy Stewart: After I went, after I got out of the Army, I went home and worked in a local business for just a few months. I was interested in doing something to kind of counteract Army time that was forced on me, so I did a one-year volunteer, volunteer worker at a small church in southern Missouri. That's where I met my wife. I went there for a year and I ended up staying a couple or three years as a forester. That's where I used most of my college training. Right there. So then, let's see. It gets complicated. From there I went to Springfield, Missouri, and I picked up an MBA with the GI Bill.

Okay.

Andy Stewart: And I was thinking about a Ph.D. program too in Iowa, University of Iowa, and I was definitely a square peg inside a round hole, so that didn't work out very well. But anyway, we worked there a while and then ended up . . . Well, the other reason for Iowa City, that's where my library degree was granted. So I went back to library school and graduated from there in '87. Then we moved to Rolla, Missouri, that summer. So to get us to Rolla then, a couple of years later, a friend of mine said, "Hey, you should check out the Army Reserve." He knew I'd had the basic training and a couple of years of service. And at that time, the reserve unit in town was an engineer company. We had quarry platoon, well drilling platoon, water platoon, and asphalt platoon. We could . . . I know once they paved the little road to one of the small parks in our town and if there was a VFW facility, they could either drill a well or make a paved parking lot or even a gravel parking lot. So they did that type of work in the community and that was really beneficial both for the training aspect of the military and the VFWs and the American Legions that benefitted from having the actual work done. Well, like all things Army, that

changed over time and we became a electronics repair company they kind of switched around reserves centers. There's one that used to be in St. Charles. They brought that one to Rolla. I should back up a little bit. When I first went in the reserve, I was working in the orderly room. I was a clerk typist, basically. In-processing new soldiers and worrying about the paperwork.

Were you brought back in at the rank that you had left in 1974?

Andy Stewart: I ended up a Specialist 4th Class in 1972, and then I came back in as a PFC, pretty close to 40 years old, and as a reservist. They knocked me down a little bit. I came back up pretty fast. I was up to specialist within six months, I'm sure of that.

Okay.

Andy Stewart: Good question. I meant to say that. Then we switched over to electronics repair and that was a little bit different because they brought in some soldier that had been in St. Charles and they retrained some of us. Somewhere along the way, I ended up in, the military term is, tech supply. I guess they were going to convert one of the clerk positions to a like a full-time position, I think.

Okay.

Andy Stewart: So that time we had basically an E-7 and me that were the personnel for the rotation of the other, essentially one or maybe two, people on a weekend. Then they brought in a full-time position, so I couldn't be the clerk typist anymore. So I got switched over to tech supply which was essentially managing the flow of repair parts. Sometimes you have in inventory, sometimes you had to place an order for one. Sometimes when you get a new part you have to return the core, like on a radiator. There was an exchange process, repairable exchange process. So I learned about that. Then made it up to a staff sergeant, eventually a Section T staff person. I remembered, along the way, it took me a long time to get my application done, but I remembered the warrant officers that would, that I first heard of that, that's the missile unit. The 1st through the 7th ADA Battalion. My joke was that I used to be able to . . . I'd been around long enough to read a pay chart, so I applied to become a warrant officer. I can say that was in 2002 that I was down at Fort Rucker, and I was definitely stress-challenged to do that.

What was the most stressful part of it for you?

Andy Stewart: Well, for one thing, it was straight through. If you do that course as an active Army, you do that in six weeks time and you have your weekends off. For the reservists, they crunched that same amount of work and training and classroom stuff into, I think, 30 days, with no time off. People would find a latrine and shut the door for two minutes to get some down time. We scrubbed everything we could and did lots of PT. I was actually . . . As it turned out, I was the oldest member of my class. So at the end of the graduation ceremony, they had a cake where the youngest and the oldest soldiers cut the cake. So I was twice as old as the youngest one. I was 58 and he was 29. The other thing was, at the very beginning, they said, "You'll need some road guards." So I was a road guard and that definitely helped my PT score at the end. Of course you had to pass the PT test to stay in the course at the beginning. I'm not sure if we took one in the middle or not. Probably not. Then at the end we had to take another one. So I don't remember what the difference was. That's where you run ahead to the intersection and the company runs behind you while you've got the traffic stopped. Then you catch up at the end of the company

run. So it was just the no breaks was the most stressful part. You're always on. It was up early and you didn't really stay out late and get things done. But it was a very meticulous demanding inspection process with our wall walkers and stuff like that during Fort Rucker.

So then, at that point, after you were finished, you were able to go back into the . . . Was it the National Guard or Army Reserve?

Andy Stewart: Army Reserve, yeah.

Army Reserve. Okay. And for folks that don't know, what is the easiest way of explaining the difference between Army Reserve and National Guard?

Andy Stewart: Well, my recruiter, when I asked him that way back in 1987, he said, "The Army Reserve just gets called out for the big stuff." That was long before Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom. Because actually in my . . . Later on I'll tell you. My deployment time, we had a National Guard company underneath the battalion, the group I was in, and we had active Army people that were above us. So it was kind of an interesting mix to see all the three branches of the Army working together at the same mission. Yeah. So then I was at Fort Rucker in 2002. By that time I was a W-1, at the end of that time. And within the kind of the odd aspect of warrant officers in general, no one really knew how to process on the reserve side, properly do my promotion thing. It's pretty much automatic after one year unless you totally mess up. But I was thinking of my promotion, kind of digging out the regulations and getting together with the first sergeant. He was a full-time person, acting first sergeant, personnel stuff. At that particular annual training, in about probably August of 2004, my acting commander and acting first sergeant said, "You're going to get deployed." It wasn't too much of a surprise. Because we'd seen another NCO from the reserve earlier in the summer said, "Oh yeah, you're going to go to that thing." I knew there was nothing I could do about it. And again, I was . . . One of my friends at work said, "You are going to skip the country, right?" I said, "No, I'm not going to skip the country. I'm the last person in the county to skip the country." So anyway, we were at Fort McCoy for annual training and I didn't finish my two weeks of training there. I was . . . I think it was the middle of the first week of our two-week time but by the end of the following week I was in Omaha with my duffel bag packed and I was a few loose ends tied up at home and at work. So I was activated for a little bit . . . Well, I guess it was a total . . . Let's see. I don't have those exact dates in mind again. But basically a year, counting our training and our pre-mobilization work at Fort Riley. And then by the time Katrina hit the following August I was on my way home. So it was less than a year overseas and that was in Iraq. I'm not sure I've gotten your . . . I probably have the sequence all messed up.

No, that's fine. So tell us then, sir, what was it like being deployed and having to leave your family and go serve overseas and that sort of thing?

Andy Stewart: For me, I was in a relatively safe place and my wife and son that was at home had the worst half of the deployment. I knew I was safe. We had . . . Here's the best way to give a contrast. On our way we did a vehicle convoy from Kuwait up to Al Asad Airbase which is actually a Marine-operated installation because of an airbase, airstrips that were there. On our way, we stopped at the Baghdad International Airport and just coincidentally saw a unit that I knew was there from Missouri. The 245th Maintenance Company. So I saw . . . And we actually stayed, they kept us off the road because of the buildup on the assault on Fallujah. We were there

three or four days. On the average, those guys that were there had an average of more than one rocket attack per day. And that was a small compound. It might have a little bit more than a kilometer long and a little bit less than a kilometer wide. And there was a road that went right past the gate. There was a little village not too far down. So they were basically in an urban area. And I think they probably . . . The Army had counterattack radar but it calculates where the shell came from but they actually had a big tall tower that was like an observation tower. Not this company but in that region near the airport. So they had basically one rocket attack per day and if they missed a day, probably two or three the next day. Whereas Al Asad is very much in a remote part of the desert. It was near a small town close by that might have been Hit. H-I-T.

Yep.

Andy Stewart: We had about one rocket attack and this was a huge, something like eight miles in diameter. We had about one per month. So it was totally different from the ones that had the daily rocket attacks. I had a little bit of that kind of activity but mostly it was kind of learning about my job. I'd had warrant officer advanced course. No, warrant officer basic course in Fort Lee, Virginia, probably in about 2003, something like that. But then, so I was learning these Army systems that I'd never really had a chance to even see before. And we had two companies that were underneath us that did the actual warehouse-type work. Still the same field as those repair parts we were managing at a company level but with a lot more parts and we had multiclass warehouses with lumber and tires and all kinds of repair parts for engines and vehicles.

How long did you ultimately spend in country?

Andy Stewart: Well, let's see. It must have been nine months because we were there . . . The very beginning of our time was Thanksgiving Day and there was a little bit of grumbling because we weren't recognizing Thanksgiving Day. They probably had a good spread at the mess hall but we just basically worked straight through. And like I said, by the end of August, we were pretty much on our way home. So November through August.

Okay. What was it like returning back home? Tell us a little bit about that.

Andy Stewart: It was unimaginable, indescribably joyful to be back. We had heard about some groups that, you know, the plane would take off and then it would get diverted to go back to the airbase and you weren't done yet. But that did not happen to us. We were . . . At least part of that time we were on, it must have been from Al Asad down to Kuwait, we were on a C-130. We were . . . There's four rows of seats that run parallel to the sides of the plane. And of course, there's one outside and two in the middle, one facing left, one facing right. Our knees are basically interlocked on that flight. That was a fairly short flight. And then, I can't remember if we . . . What that route was. Anyway, we ended up in Topeka, Kansas, and then bused back to Fort Riley.

When did you get to see your family again?

Andy Stewart: Let's see. They came up to Fort Riley to see us and they were equally happy because there was just . . . For my communication while I was in Al Asad, there was a Marine-run kind of a computer lab where you could use it for email. So I was not perfect on email but two to three times a week email. I could phone my wife once a week which was Sunday

morning, my time, but it was Saturday night on her time. So we got pretty regular on that. It was some kind of proprietary telephone system that you could buy a card and buy time for and put in your code number, pay the bill, then add money to it. So then, after that, everything was pretty much cut and dried. I ended up . . . That same company that I'd seen in Baghdad Airport was located in St. Louis. So then our unit got switched around. There's one thing I need to say. At the very end, we were part of the 245th Maintenance Company which was the one I had seen in Baghdad, but they had a . . . I was the detachment commander and it was kind of a lower level making sure all the training boxes were checked off and making sure the posts, the deployment health questionnaires are checked out, that type of thing. But before that, with my original company, the 424th Maintenance Company, when our company commander was, I think it was more a little bit of his option to deploy than his commander, the battalion commander. He chose to deploy with that other unit which meant there was an opening so I was actually a company commander as a warrant officer 2 for about six months. And in a way, it was kind of fill-in position. We had a one successful annual training. Managed a lot of planning for that and then active work like my Al Asad time it was . . . You were working in the lab, not the labs, but the shops with the civilians. That was at Fort McCoy too. So we had a . . . Did annual training but then by the end of September then we got, at the end of September, that whole company got deactivated. So I might be the warrant officer 2 that has the most command time of anyone in the Army. I haven't found a way to check that. It doesn't really matter. But overall, my Army time was very productive, even in deployment, I would say my wife was more worried than I was because she didn't have her hands-on view of what I was up to.

They are always worried because they don't know where someone is from minute to minute and that sort of thing.

Andy Stewart: Right. Right.

So then, you retired, I take it then, in 2008?

Andy Stewart: Right.

What was that like, after all the years of service, to finally take the uniform off for the last time?

Andy Stewart: Well, you still remember different individuals even back in my early times of my Army Reserve time. There was a man I worked with on the same campus. I'd see him every once in a while. That military bond is pretty hard to improve on as far bringing people close together. I think probably it's also just a shared experience. Everyone, Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, has that basic training experience which is essentially the same which does give you something in common even though the service was different or the place, location, was different. The other part of my story is that my son, before I got deployed, he joined the Marines.

Okay. Great.

Andy Stewart: Dad was a Marine too. I don't know if I said that before, in World War II. So the Marines skipped a generation by me getting drafted. But William has completed a ten-year career in the Marines. Now he works as a civilian instructor.

So he was in basic training while you were overseas deployed?

Andy Stewart: No, we saw his basic training graduation in early 2004.

That's great. That's great.

Andy Stewart: Then he was doing some other training and my wife took her folks out to see that graduation. I was at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey.

And I imagine he probably had a chance to do a deployment as well, correct?

Andy Stewart: Yes. He was deployed in Greece, Iraq, and Afghanistan. He had what the Marines call a Mediterranean cruise, which means they take off from Virginia and end up going through the Straits of Gibraltar, through the Suez Canal, kind of joint country training experiences. His job kept him a little bit more on the ship rather than out kicking down doors. But then he also kind of reconstituted that ship during the, after the Haiti earthquake. He was down in Haiti.

He was in Haiti as well.

Andy Stewart: I think the funniest thing of that was when he was with a unit someplace, it might have been in training. His sergeant said, "Call your dad." Then he found switching network that he could just call. That was really odd to hear his voice. He must have called a couple of times.

While he was at basic training or on the deployment?

Andy Stewart: I think probably advanced training, somewhere along the way. Probably in Monterey. He felt badly that he was not deployed and I was. Overall, it worked out pretty well.

That's great. That's great. Well sir, I really appreciate you taking the time to share your story and your memories with us. I don't think I told you but here at the Land Office we have archives that go back to the 1700s. We have the original land grant that belonged to David Crockett's widow and we have the registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the Anglo settlers that came to Texas. Our goal with these interviews is to save them for posterity as well. You know, we're going to send you copies of this for you to give to friends or family or whomever. But our goal also is to save these in our archives. Hopefully, people will listen to these interviews maybe hundreds of years from now. With that in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview long after you and I are both gone?

Andy Stewart: Well, it's a noble profession. The military in general is. Not everyone is cut out for that. It's an important job. In general, I think at the lowest levels there's support for the troops. And at the highest level sometimes you get a little bit more dissension, so somewhere in the middle there, it changes over. A nation supports its troops. But it's an undeniable service. That's how I viewed that along with a little bit of my other life and activities. In a way, I was just doing my job.

Yes sir. And it's noble too that now it's a family tradition. At least three consecutive generations now in your family's case of service. So that's great.

Andy Stewart: On my mom's side, Grandpa, was active but only for a short time at the very end of World War II. He stayed in Iowa. Camp Dodge for a real short military career. If you count that, it's four generations.

That's great. That is great. Well sir, we really do appreciate you taking the time to let us record this interview with you. Like I said, a couple of weeks we'll send you copies of this interview on CDs along with a nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson. It's just a small way of the State of Texas saying thank you to you for your service to our nation. I know Commissioner Patterson and everybody here at the Land Office wants to thank you and your family for their service.

Andy Stewart: Okay. Did you say something about pictures or is that something else?

Yes sir. If you have any pictures that you can email to me, we'd like to get those and then when we get your interview posted on the website, we'll put your pictures on there as well. If you look at the new website which is the same address, VoicesofVeterans.org, some veterans have a lot of great photos, but there are many unfortunately that don't have any pictures. If you have any pictures, send them to us and we'll put them on there.

Andy Stewart: I'm pretty sure I have at least one of my basic training. Standard photo.

That's great. Send us a whole bunch and we can put a bunch on there. Like I said, look through the website and you'll see some of the veterans that have submitted five or six photos and you can see all those and then, unfortunately, there's a lot of veterans that don't have any pictures to send in to us. That would be great.

Andy Stewart: Okay. I appreciate your time and your service this morning. You have a military background too, don't you?

Yes sir. I'm in the Marines. I appreciate the fact that your father and your son are both Marines too. That's great.

Andy Stewart: Okay.

Well sir, thank you very much and I'm sure we'll talk again soon.

Andy Stewart: Thank you. I'll send you at least something.

It sounds great. Take care, sir. Bye-bye.